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ABSTRACT

An overview is provided of the basic elements of the nation's immigrant integration and immigration policies as they affect immigrant families. The focus is on two sets of reforms under consideration by Congress that would have far-reaching effects. One set of changes would curb legal immigrants' access to a wide array of public benefits. The other set of reforms would substantially reduce legal immigration levels, severely restrict the immigration of extended family members, and place tough new requirements on those seeking to bring in family members. These proposals would demote the civic status of legal immigrants and redefine the membership in society in unprecedented ways. They would eliminate the safety net for many immigrant families, impose heavier support obligations on the families of immigrants than those of natives, draw irrational distinctions among immigrant families, and fail to distinguish between types of services in ways that reduce social and administrative costs. The impacts of restricted immigration policies for family members might eliminate a significant source of social capital. The cumulative effects of these proposed policy changes raise important unanswered questions. (Contains 40 references.) (SLD)

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